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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRESENT STATE

OF

MUSIC,

IN

LONDON.

BY WILLIAM JACKSON,
OF EXETER.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR HARRISON AND CO.
NO. 18, PATERNOSTER ROW.
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ADVERTISEMENT.

GENERAL obſervations on any of the Arts are always ſuſpected to be made with a view either to depreſs, or elevate, particular Artiſts: and, though it is to no purpoſe to declare the contrary, yet I cannot help following the example of Fielding and Le Sage; and, like them, muſt be permitted to ſay, that *things*, not *perſons*, are my aim—*Muſic*, not *Muſicians*, is my ſubject.

As a proof of my ſincerity, I have not mentioned the name of any living Profeſſor;

Profeſſor; and, as much as poſſible, have carefully avoided any remarks which might lead to a particular application. I equally diſclaim panegyric or ſatire. If my obſervations ſhould, at times, ſeem to ſhrink from the matter, let it be remembered, that they were made under reſtraint; and the fear of giving offence may have prevented an exertion of the power to pleaſe, and deſtroyed ſome entertainment that the ſubject was well calculated to produce.

OBSER-

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRESENT STATE OF MUSIC,

IN LONDON.

MUSIC is ſo much *the rage*—to uſe a faſhionable term—that ſome remarks on the preſent Style of COMPOSITION and PERFORMANCE may not be unacceptable to the Public. But this, perhaps, is an haſty aſſertion: if we are pleaſed, we cannot feel much gratitude for the philoſophy which demonſtrates that we ought *not* to be pleaſed. Horace's MADMAN

is

is too trite an example to be quoted; but, if I may judge of the ſenſations of others by my own, we are not altogether in his ſituation: the deluſion may be made to vaniſh, and reality ſubſtituted, without deſtroying "*animi gratiſſimus error*."

As, perhaps, the pureſt and moſt enchanting pleaſure which the mind can feel ariſes from Music—I addreſs myſelf to thoſe only who have an *ear* and *taſte*—ſurely any attempt to heighten that pleaſure is laudable: and if, by ſome aukward and unfortunate circumſtances, our preſent pleaſure is derived from polluted ſources, it cannot be amiſs to ſhew that they are ſo; and point out others which, by being more pure, are undoubtedly more capable of producing that exquiſite

ſenſation

ſenſation which it is the excluſive property of Muſic to beſtow.

I MEAN but to give ſome detached thoughts on this ſubject, without form, juſt as they occur: but, though I do not affect method, I do not deſpiſe it; and ſhall think myſelf fortunate, if my arguments ſhould, by accident, come in aid of each other.

PERFECT MUSIC—if my idea be juſt—is the uniting MELODY to HARMONY. Though the aſſiſtance which each receives from the other is immenſe, yet MELODY is beſt qualified to exiſt alone. The pleaſure excited by a ſucceſſion of chords, is very inferior to that natural, and ſometimes artificial, ſucceſſion

of ſingle ſounds, which Muſicians diſtinguiſh by the term *Melody*.

THOUGH not abſolutely unknown, Melody was in a barbarous ſtate until the laſt hundred years. It long continued improving, but now ſeems, in this country at leaſt, to be in a fair way of ſhortly loſing it's exiſtence.

IN conſequence of Muſic being much ſtudied and practiſed, VOCAL and INSTRUMENTAL MELODY became two different things: it is neceſſary, therefore, to conſider them ſeparately.

VOCAL MUSIC had once nothing but Harmony to ſubſiſt on: by degrees, Melody

was

was added; and now it is very near being loſt again.

In the Grand Opera, Songs may be conſidered as *pathetic*, *bravura*, ſomething *between the two* which has no name, and Airs called *Cavatina*. Generally, the laſt have moſt Melody, and the firſt ſort have leaſt: but it is ſcarce worth while to aſcertain which has moſt, where all are defective. If it were not for ſome paſſages that have been worn to rags, how few of theſe Songs poſſeſs the leaſt trace of real Melody! This muſt remain an aſſertion without proof, unleſs I could define Melody: which I really cannot, ſo as to be intelligible to thoſe who have no ear; and, to thoſe who have, a definition would be needleſs. But let me obſerve, where

ſounds follow each other in that arrangement we call TUNE, beſides the immediate pleaſure, there is always joined with it an *Impreſſion*, which enables us to remember paſſages, and ſometimes an entire Air. But this is never the caſe in a fortuitous or unmeaning ſucceſſion of ſounds. Let the Muſic of the preſent day be "weighed in this balance," and the greater part will be found "wanting."

THESE ſame obſervations will do for the Opera *Buffa*, omitting the term *Pathetic*, and ſubſtituting *Comic* in it's room. But it is uſing THALIA very ill, to call the nonſenſical folly of this Drama, *Comic*.

IN the ENGLISH OPERA, the Compoſers very wiſely adapt ſome of the Songs to Tunes which

which were compoſed when Melody really exiſted: and it is curious to obſerve how glad the Audience are to find a little that is congenial to their feelings, after they have been gaping to take in ſome meaning from the wretched imitations of Italian *bravura*, and pathetic Songs; which, alas! are but "the Shadows of a Shade!"

As the SONGS which are performed at CONCERTS are moſtly taken from Italian Operas, they require no additional obſervations on the merit of the compoſition.

ANOTHER ſort of Muſic is frequently part of thoſe entertainments, called GLEES. No doubt, the uniting of three or more voices in harmony produces a pleaſing effect. But why

why is Melody to be baniſhed? And baniſhed it is ſo totally, that, of all the numerous Dirges and doleful Ditties with which our Benefit-Concerts are ſo ſorely afflicted—for they are too precious for *common uſe*—ſcarce one can be found that has half as much tune as one of Claude le jeune's Pſalms.

I HAVE ſometimes aſked Muſicians, why they perform ſuch ſtuff? The conſtant anſwer is, "That they conform to the taſte of the Public." And I really believe that they ſpeak as they think; for it is certain that the Audience ſhew every mark of the loudeſt approbation. But it is in MUSIC, as in the DRAMA; what is leaſt felt, is moſt applauded. When an Actor rants, or gives a touch of what paſſes for pathetic, it is conſidered as a

mark

mark of inſenſibility not to be affected. Thus, when ſounds have been uttered in which are not the leaſt trace of a tune, it ſhews a ſuperior taſte and feeling to find ſomething to admire, where the common ear is offended, or at beſt perceives nothing.

If our Vocal Music has diſmiſſed Melody as unneceſſary; our Instrumental Music has cloſely followed the bad example.

The old Concerto is now loſt, and modern Full-Pieces are either in the form of Overtures or Symphonies. The Overture of the Italian Opera never pretends to much; that of the Engliſh Opera always endeavours to have an Air ſomewhere, and the endeavour alone makes it acceptable. As the firſt move-

ment

ment of the OVERTURE is moſt commonly like that of a SYMPHONY, what I have ſaid of the latter will do for both.

WHEN Richter introduced among us this ſtyle of Muſic, it was juſtly admired, being the firſt inſtance of attention to the different character of Inſtruments; a nicety unknown to Handel, or to any of his predeceſſors. Richter was very ſucceſsfully followed by Abel, and many others. But later Compoſers, to be grand and original, have poured in ſuch floods of nonſenſe, under the ſublime idea of *being inſpired*, that the preſent SYMPHONY bears the ſame relation to good Muſic, as the ravings of a Bedlamite do to ſober ſenſe. Sometimes the Key is perfectly loſt, by wandering

dering ſo far from it, that there is no road to return—but extremes meet at laſt of themſelves. The Meaſure is ſo perplexed by arbitrary diviſions of Notes, that it ſeems as if the Compoſer intended to exhibit a Table of twos, threes, and fours. And, when Diſcords get ſo entangled, that it is paſt the art of man to untie the knot, ſomething in the place of Alexander's ſword does the buſineſs at once. All theſe paltry ſhifts to conceal the want of Air, can never be admitted to ſupply it's place.

WHERE there is *really* Air, it will exiſt under all diſadvantages of Performance. But, what would become of our Sublimities, if it were not for the ſhort cut of a *Pianiſſimo*, ſo delicate as almoſt to eſcape the ear, and then

a ſudden change into all the *Fortiſſimo* that Fiddling, Fluting, Trumpeting, and Drumming, can beſtow?

Let it not be imagined, that I wiſh to burleſque expreſſive Performance. I am only ſhewing my thorough contempt of that wretched ſtuff, the exiſtence of which altogether depends upon mechanical contrivance, while the *ſoul* is wanting—

" Thus Harlequin extoll'd his Horſe,
Fit for the War, the Road, the Courſe:
His mouth was ſoft, his eye was good;
His foot as ſure as ever trod.
One fault he had—a fault, indeed!
Pray, what was that?—The Horſe was *dead!*"

Prior.

Perhaps

PERHAPS I may be told, that though there is nothing of what I call *Tune* which exiſts in the firſt movement of SYMPHONIES; yet it is found in the middle and laſt Movements, where it is in it's proper place.

TO which I reply—That though the kind of Air for firſt Movements is of a different caſt from what it is in the others, yet it ought to exiſt there as well. Compoſers never ſubſtitute any thing for Tune, if they really have it in their head—it is too precious!

THE Airs we have been lately uſed to hear in the middle and laſt Movements of Symphonies, are, for the moſt part, *childiſh*; and, where they are not ſo, they are *vulgar*: characters neither ſuiting the piece, nor *what*

ought, at this time, to be the taſte of the audience.

THE QUARTET and TRIO are in a much more reſpectable ſtyle; as are CONCERTOS for *particular Inſtruments:* thoſe for the Piano-forte excepted; which, of late, ſeem to have abandoned that ſtyle of Melody ſo peculiarly the property of the Inſtrument, and exchanged the eaſy flow of execution, which it has coſt ſo many years to eſtabliſh, for ſtaggering Octaves. The Cadences are invariably the ſame, and the worſt that could be invented by an imagination perverted in the extreme! The Performer, no doubt, ought to be able to run from the bottom to the top of the keys, in ſemitones; but let him be ſatisfied with having the power,

without

without exerting it, for the effect of the paſſage is to the laſt degree deteſtable!

THE moſt pleaſing of all Inſtrumental Compoſitions is the CONCERTANTE, for Three, Four, or Five principal Performers, ſupported by *Ripieni*. Whether the contraſt of the different inſtruments becomes a ſort of ſubſtitute for Melody, and is received as ſuch; or, whether there is really more tune in the Concertante; or, whether we are more intereſted becauſe of the excellence of the Performers; I know not: but it ſeems as if Air ſubſiſted more in this than any other ſpecies of Inſtrumental Muſic.

WHAT I have hitherto advanced relates to Vocal and Inſtrumental COMPOSITION; except ſome accidental Remarks on *Performance*, which

which naturally grew out of the ſubject. But there is more to be added on that head.

THE Performance of ſingle SONGS was, perhaps, never farther removed from truth than at preſent. If there were a poſſibility of writing down the ſounds which iſſue from the mouth of the Singer, my remark would be fully juſtified—but, unfortunately, Lines and Spaces will only expreſs *muſical* Intervals. Words ſeem as little ſuited to the purpoſe; for, how can one deſcribe the encompaſſing a Note with frippery flouriſhes, that prevent the real ſound from meeting the ear, until the time, in which it ſhould be heard, is paſt? How can one expreſs the filling up an Interval with ſomething compoſed of a *ſlide* and a *ſhout*,

ſhout, by which means there is no Interval at all?

THERE are ſome things, however, which *may* be deſcribed: ſuch as forcing the Voice in the upper part, where it ought ever to be ſoft; and ſinging the lower tones faint, which ſhould always be full. Cadences with, for ever, a concluding ſhake—though ſometimes it ſeems as if it would *never* conclude—and every ſhake with preciſely the ſame turn after it.

THE performance of CHORUSES is as perfect as that of Songs is deficient. The real Notes are heard without diſguiſe; and, though the Compoſer is loſt in the Song, he exiſts in the Chorus.

As

As there is nothing but Harmony in the GLEE, the performance of it cannot be falſified. The Notes, of neceſſity, are ſung ſimply and true, to preſerve the purity of the chord, which is all it has to ſubſiſt on.

WHATEVER objections may be made to the *Compoſition* of SYMPHONIES, the *Performance* of them is entitled to the higheſt praiſe. The Performer plays juſt what he ſees, and nothing elſe: as is generally the caſe with moſt Inſtrumental Muſic; which is incomparably more pure in it's execution, at preſent, than Vocal. Is it not rather uncommon, that two branches from the ſame ſtock ſhould be ſo different?

THE Notes of a Song are broken into ſo many parts, that they actually loſe their exiſtence: on the contrary, the performance of a Symphony, &c. is pure and ſimple. In the one, every thing is cut up; in the other—to borrow a phraſe from Painting—the parts are kept broad: and breadth of effect is as neceſſary in Muſic as in Painting.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC has been of late carried to ſo great perfection in London, by the conſummate ſkill of the Performers, that any attempt to beat the Time would be juſtly conſidered as entirely needleſs. I am ſorry to remark, that the attention of the Audience, at *one* Concert, has been interrupted by the vulgarity of this exploded practice, which is unworthy of the ſupreme excellence of the

Band, and highly diſguſting to the Company.

THE Performance at the ABBEY is ſo peculiar, that I ſhall keep it diſtinct by itſelf.

THE idea of an Annual Exhibition of a great Compoſer's Works is noble, and worthy of the Patronage with which it is protected; but, like moſt other things, it has it's bright and it's dark ſide. The aſſembling the largeſt and beſt Band in the world to perform ſome of the fineſt Muſic ever compoſed, muſt be conſidered as ſomething ſublime; but the employing ſuch an army of Muſicians in a bad ſelection of pieces, as is frequently the caſe, is making a poor uſe of ſuch a glorious diſplay of voices and inſtruments.

It ſhould be remembered, that as Homer and Milton have written many hundred verſes beneath notice, ſo Handel has compoſed great numbers of pieces unworthy of his genius; but, as there is no want of thoſe which are excellent, the beſt things only ſhould be ſelected.

There is a faſhion in Muſic as well as in Dreſs; and, though the rich parliamentary robes of a Peer are above faſhion, yet we expect, in common cloaths, the cut of the times. Now, there is much of Handel's Muſic that is not grand enough to be in the upper claſs; nor good enough to engage the attention of a Connoiſſeur; nor faſhionable enough to be performed before an Audience, who are at leaſt knowing in modern ſtyle.

Theſe pieces ſhould be ſuffered to ſleep quietly in oblivion; for, however we may covet variety, no one chuſes to change for the worſe.

With all my admiration of the Abbey Muſic, I think it has done a great deal of harm, and will do much more. The pieces which are performed there, have a mimic performance in almoſt every great town in the kingdom, which contributes to eſtabliſh an excluſive taſte for Handel's Muſic only. Any thing that helps to fix art to a *certain point* is deſtructive to farther improvement. Of this we have the ſtrongeſt inſtance in a neighbouring country.

In the laſt century, Lulli was thought as highly of in *France* as Handel is in *England*.

Little

Little elſe but his Muſic was performed for many years. While the reſt of the world was in a ſtate of improvement, the French ſtood ſtill; until they were left ſo far behind, that, perhaps, they may never get up their loſt way, and be in the ſame rank with the other nations of Europe. This inſtance is the more remarkable, becauſe, in the other Arts and Sciences, France has oftener been a leader than a follower.

THE harm which Lulli did in France, Handel has done, and will continue to do, in England. I juſt obſerved, that the Abbey Performance contributed to eſtabliſh a taſte for Handel, to the excluſion of the works of other maſters. Now, this is another thing to be much lamented.

FOR

For ought we know, there are numbers of Compoſers in England who may be very worthy of notice, if they had the advantage of a public exhibition. Theſe are prevented from ſhewing their abilities, by the idea that Handel alone can compoſe Oratorios, Anthems, &c. or that no one elſe can equal, much leſs excel, what he has done in that claſs of Muſic. But, by this prepoſſeſſion, the public may be cheated out of much pleaſure, and all poſſible improvement precluded.

Let us ſuppoſe, that ſuch an excluſive taſte had formerly prevailed for the Compoſers of the age of Charles the Firſt, we then ſhould have loſt Purcel; and, if no Muſic but Purcel's could have been heard in the reign of George the Firſt, Handel himſelf would have continued unknown.

To

To ſay that this principle is illiberal, and unworthy of the age or country in which we live, may be conſidered as intemperate declamation. That it directly impedes the progreſs of Art and Science, has been already remarked: but, if the public would conſider that their entertainment and pleaſure are connected with ſucceſsful novelty, they would ſurely give all attempts a fair trial; for one new piece out of fifty, being approved, is adding ſomething to the ſtock of good Muſic.

The firſt year of the Abbey Muſic was a Commemoration of Handel, and ought to conſiſt of his works only; but it might, at this time, without any impropriety which I can perceive, be open for the works of other Compoſers.

Compoſers. Suppoſe that, each day, one new Inſtrumental Piece, and one for Voices, were permitted to be performed? Though I have not the leaſt doubt, but that much good Muſic would, at times, be given to the public; yet, as my opinion may not paſs for proof, the experiment might be tried for a year or two. In caſe of failure, the loſs would not be great; but, if it ſhould ſucceed, the gain might be immenſe.

And here let me juſt obſerve, the great advantage Painting has over Music, in the eaſe by which it's Profeſſors may offer their works to the public attention.

The Exhibition is open to all; beſides which, every Painter has an Exhibition at his own

own Houſe. On the contrary, every public Muſical Performance, in London, may be ſaid, in moſt reſpects, to be upon an *excluſive principle*.——It muſt be remembered, that I profeſs avoiding every thing that leads to particular application. It is the *general* ſtate of Muſic in this metropolis, it's defects, and it's excellences, which have been the ſubject of this ſhort and imperfect ſketch; which I leave to be finiſhed by thoſe who poſſeſs more ability, and greater ſources of information.

FINIS.